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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000976

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CJTF-HOA PLEASE PASS MARCENT
PARIS FOR NEARY
STATE FOR AF/E, AF/RSA, PM

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SUBJECT: VISIT OF FRANCE'S DEFENSE MINISTER TO DJIBOUTI:
ANXIETY ABOUT U.S. PRESENCE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) During Ambassador's 7/15 meeting with Minister of Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Ali Youssef, Ambassador raised the July 8-9 visit to Djibouti of France's Defense Minister, Michele Alliot-Marie. Alliot-Marie had met during her time in Djibouti with President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Djiboutian military officials. She had also visited an education project France is funding in Obock and France's Ambassador to Djibouti had hosted a diplomatic reception in her honor.

12. (C) Youssef told Ambassador that this visit was Alliot-Marie's third in the past two years. That, he said, is unprecedented in the history of the Djiboutian-French post-independence relationship. He said Alliot-Marie sought "reassurances" from Djibouti on the continuity of Djibouti-French relations and seemed clearly worried about the implications for that relationship of the U.S. military presence at Camp Lemonier. According to Youssef, Alliot-Marie was concerned that Djibouti intended to replace France's military presence with an American presence.

13. (C) Youssef said his government made clear to Alliot-Marie that France and Djibouti enjoy a special relationship and that there was no intention to displace France's presence. The U.S. has a different focus and it is the war against terrorism. He said Alliot-Marie also asked for, and got, Djibouti's agreement "in principle" to obtain a tract of land near Camp Lemonier on which to station aircraft and accommodate a contingent of service persons. He said he thought she sought guarantees on this issue in order to lock in an option for France prior to start of U.S. - Djibouti negotiations on access renewal.

14. (C) Youssef said Alliot-Marie's request was not the first for this tract of land. Former French Ambassador to Djibouti Roussel had asked for the land in January prior to the end of his tenure as ambassador. Youssef said there is no written agreement between Djibouti and France for the parcel in question. (Comment: Commander of French Forces in Djibouti, General Gerard Pons, has made clear to us the interest of France's military in obtaining use of a tract of land adjacent to Camp Lemonier -- described locally as 15 hectares -- on which to station some of its aircraft. End comment.)

15. (U) France has approximately 2,850 service men and women in Djibouti and Djibouti is France's largest military presence outside France. In August, 2003, it agreed to pay to Djibouti 30 million euros annually (approximately \$36 million) for use of military facilities in country. The agreement is for ten years.

16. (C) Ambassador raised with Youssef the composition of Djibouti's delegation for talks on renewal of the U.S. access agreement. Youssef said the composition of Djibouti's delegation would depend on where talks are held. If they are held in Washington, Ambassador Olhaye would be the negotiator. If they are held in Djibouti, the composition would need to be determined. He said it would be preferable to hold talks in Washington, in order to maintain confidentiality of discussions, for facilitation of language

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issues, and because Olhaye has had greater experience in working with and understanding Americans. (Comment: Youssef's statements would tend to indicate that Washington should consider taking the lead and proposing that locale as best venue for these negotiations. End comment.)

17. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.
RAGSDALE